

Briefing Paper

Sustainable Development in Rural Areas

October 2003

The Government has concluded that a considerable amount of the material in PPG7, its current guidance on planning in the countryside, is out of date and/or inappropriate for a shorter, focused statement of national planning policies. It has therefore issued a draft planning policy statement for public consultation which "sets out the Government's broad policy objectives relevant to rural areas in England, and its proposed planning policies that will help deliver these objectives". These policies are "firmly based on the principles of sustainable development and the need to protect the wider, largely undeveloped countryside for the benefit of all".

The draft PPS includes new policies on the replacement of buildings in the countryside, and on equine-related activities, whilst the policies on community services and on tourism and leisure are expanded. On tourism and leisure the draft reflects the policies the Government would expect to include in PPS7 if it decides to proceed with its proposals (subject to separate consultation) to cancel PPG21, *Tourism*. The proposals also include a significant change to the policy on local countryside designations.

One specific proposal is the removal of the policy which allows large, high quality houses to be built in the open countryside.

The Government has sought to omit from the draft most of the background, contextual and non-planning material in PPG7, as well as material setting out statutory requirements (as opposed to policy) and guidance on how policies are to be implemented. It has also sought to minimise duplication of policies more appropriately set out in other PPGs, and any successor PPS, and the number of cross-references to these documents.

Annex A sets out important policy criteria for new occupational dwellings in the countryside. It also sets out the policy on the imposition and removal of occupancy conditions for such dwellings. Specifically it proposes that the policy criteria applied to farm and forestry workers' dwellings should also be applied to countryside dwellings associated with other occupations, as appropriate.

The Government proposes to issue accompanying guidance on agricultural and forestry permitted development rights when the final version of PPS7 is published. It is anticipated that this guidance would be closely based on Annex E to PPG7, amended to reflect any changes that may be made as a result of the current Government review of the Town & Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995.

Currently there are other, highly relevant, separate reviews (subject to public consultation) including the review and update of guidance on planning for affordable housing announced in The Communities Plan, and a review, led by DEFRA, on the present policy in respect of best and most versatile agricultural land.

The period of public consultation ends on 12 December 2003. All responses, and any questions to:

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Draft PPS7 - The Government's Proposals

Planning Policy Statements (PPS) set out the Government's national policies on different aspects of planning. The policies in this statement apply to country towns and villages, rural business development and rural services, and the wider, largely undeveloped countryside. They complement, but do not replace or overrule, other national planning policies and should be read in conjunction with other relevant statements of national planning policy. This PPS replaces Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) Note 7 published in February 1997.

The policies set out in this statement will need to be taken into account by regional planning bodies in the preparation of Regional Planning Guidance (or any successor) and by local planning authorities in the preparation of development plans (or their successors); they may also be material to decisions on individual planning applications.

The Government's Objectives

In its November 2000 rural White Paper, *Our countryside: the future*, the Government set out its vision of a living, working, protected and vibrant countryside. Its aim was to sustain and enhance the distinctive environment, economy and social fabric of the English countryside for the benefit of all, recognising the interdependence between urban and rural areas. Since the publication of the White Paper, the Government has set out its proposals for creating sustainable communities that meet the needs of all (February 2003), and launched its strategy for sustainable farming and food in England (December 2002).

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In carrying forward this vision and the associated strategies, the Government's objectives are:

- i. To raise the quality of life and the environment in rural areas through the promotion of:
 - thriving, inclusive and sustainable rural communities;
 - sustainable economic growth and diversification;
 - good quality, sustainable development that respects local distinctiveness and the intrinsic qualities of the countryside; and
 - a high level of protection for our most valued landscapes and environmental resources.
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- ii. To promote more sustainable patterns of development and support an urban renaissance - focusing most development in and around existing towns and villages; discouraging the development of 'greenfield' land, especially in the countryside; promoting a range of uses to maximise the potential benefits of the countryside fringing urban areas; and providing appropriate leisure opportunities to enable urban and rural dwellers to enjoy the wider countryside.
- iii. To make sustainable improvements in the economic performance of all English regions and, over the long term, reduce the persistent gap in growth rates within and between the regions - promoting competitive, diverse and thriving rural enterprise that provides a range of jobs and underpins strong economies.
- iv. To promote sustainable, diverse and adaptable agriculture sectors where farming achieves high environmental standards, minimising impact on natural resources, and contributes both directly and indirectly to rural economic diversity; is itself competitive and profitable; and provides high quality products that the public wants.

Planning authorities have an important role to play in delivering the Government's objectives for rural areas, through their operation of the planning system and the application of the policies set out in this and other Planning Policy Statements (PPS) and Planning Policy Guidance Notes.

National Planning Policies

Key Principles

1. Planning authorities should adhere to the following principles in their approach to planning and development control in rural areas:
 - i. Decisions on development proposals should be firmly based on sustainable development principles - ensuring an integrated approach to the consideration of social progress, effective protection of the environment, prudent use of natural resources, and maintaining high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.
 - ii. Good quality, carefully-sited development within existing towns and villages should be allowed where it meets local economic and community needs (including affordable housing for identified local needs), maintains or enhances the local environment, and does not conflict with other planning policies.
 - iii. Larger scale developments should be located in or near to towns or other service centres that are accessible by public transport, walking and cycling.
 - iv. New development away from existing settlements, or outside areas allocated for development in development plans, should be strictly controlled; in particular, isolated new houses in the countryside require special justification.

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- v. Priority should be given to the re-use of previously-developed (brownfield) sites in preference to the development of greenfield sites, except in cases where brownfield sites perform so poorly in terms of sustainability considerations (e.g. remoteness from settlements and services) in comparison with greenfield sites.
- vi. All development in rural areas should be well designed, in keeping and scale with its location, and sensitive to the character of the countryside and local distinctiveness.

Sustainable Rural Communities, Rural Businesses and Services

- 2. Planning authorities should adopt positive policies in their development plans for sustainable development to revitalise and support country towns and villages (including the provision of affordable housing) and for strong, diverse, economic activity in rural areas, whilst maintaining a high quality environment. To ensure these policies are relevant and effective, local planning authorities should be aware of the circumstances, needs and priorities of the rural communities and businesses in their area. Where there is a lack of up to date, robust information, local authorities should commission surveys and assessments of rural economic and social conditions and needs, including local housing needs.

Location of development

- 3. Outside urban areas, planning authorities should focus most new development in or near to local service centres, where employment, housing (including affordable housing), services and other facilities can be provided close together. This should help to ensure these facilities are served by public transport and provide some potential for access by walking and cycling. These centres (which might be a country town, a single large village or a group of villages) should be identified in the development plan as the preferred location for such development.
- 4. Away from these centres, planning authorities should allow some limited development to meet local business, community and identified local housing needs, particularly in order to maintain the viability and vitality of smaller towns and villages. In particular, authorities should be supportive of small-scale development of this nature where it provides the most sustainable option in villages that are remote from, and have poor public transport links with, service centres.
- 5. Local planning authorities should identify in their development plans the circumstances in which new development will be allowed within and adjacent to settlements that are not identified service centres, and, exceptionally, on any other rural sites.

Business development and employment

- 6. Planning authorities should support a wide range of economic activity in rural areas, particularly where traditional, rural-based industries are in decline. Local planning authorities should therefore:
 - i. identify suitable sites for future employment use in development plans;
 - ii. make provision for new buildings, as well as the re-use of existing buildings, for industrial and business development;

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- iii. clarify the scale of allowable business development in different locations and the criteria against which planning applications will be considered, taking particular account of regional priorities expressed in regional planning guidance;
- iv. set out policies on the future expansion of business premises in rural areas, allowing where possible for reasonable future expansion on site.

Community services and facilities

7. People who live or work in rural areas should have reasonable access to a range of services and facilities. Local planning authorities should:
 - i. facilitate and provide for new services and facilities (e.g. through the use of planning obligations and the identification of sites in plans), particularly where;
 - planning permission is granted for new developments in country towns or other service centres;
 - settlements, or the population of their rural catchments, are expanding;
 - there is an identified need for new or expanded services to strengthen the role of a particular rural service centre;
 - ii. seek opportunities (e.g. through planning obligations) to enhance public transport as a means of improving access to service centres;
 - iii. identify in development plans suitable buildings and development sites for community services and facilities to meet the needs of a range of users, including people with disabilities;
 - iv. support mixed and multi-purpose uses that maintain community vitality;
 - v. support the provision of small-scale, local service facilities (e.g. childcare facilities) to meet community needs in areas away from main service centres, particularly where they would benefit those rural residents who would find it difficult to use more distant service centres. These local facilities should be located within or adjacent to existing villages and settlements where access can be gained by walking, cycling and (where available) public transport.
8. Planning authorities should adopt a positive approach to planning proposals designed to improve the viability, accessibility or community value of existing services and facilities, such as village shops and post offices, rural petrol stations, village halls and rural public houses that play a vital role in sustaining village communities. Planning authorities should support the retention of these local facilities and should set out in development plans the criteria they will apply in considering applications that will result in the loss of vital village services (e.g., from conversion to residential use).

Housing

9. The Government's planning objectives and policies for housing are set out in PPG3. The key aim is to offer everyone the opportunity of a decent home. The housing needs of all in the community should be recognised, including those in need of affordable or special housing in rural areas. It is essential that local planning authorities plan to meet housing requirements in rural areas, based on an up to date assessment of local need. To promote more sustainable patterns of development and make better use of previously developed land, the focus for most additional housing should be on existing towns and cities. But it will also be necessary to provide for some new housing to meet identified local need in villages.

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10. In planning for housing in their rural areas, local planning authorities should apply the policies in PPG3. They should:
 - i. have particular regard to PPG3 guidance on the provision of housing in villages and should make sufficient land available, either within or adjoining existing villages, to meet the needs of local people;
 - ii. strictly control new house building (including single dwellings) in the countryside, away from established settlements or from areas allocated for housing in development plans.
11. Isolated new houses in the countryside will require special justification for planning permission to be granted. For example, the need to enable farm, forestry or certain other workers who are essential for the effective and safe operation of rural-based enterprises, to live permanently at or near their place of work, may constitute special justification in this context. In these and any other cases where special justification is claimed, planning authorities should examine applications for isolated new houses particularly carefully and, wherever appropriate, follow the advice in Annex A to this statement.

Re-use of buildings within or adjacent to towns and villages

12. Local planning authorities should be particularly supportive of the re-use of existing buildings within or adjacent to country towns and villages, for business or community uses, or to provide housing in accordance with the policies in PPG3 and subject to the policies in paragraph 8 of this PPS in relation to the retention of local services. Authorities should apply the criteria in paragraph 20 where appropriate. These criteria must be applied when authorities are considering applications involving buildings outside towns and villages.

Design and the character of rural settlements

13. Many country towns and villages are of considerable historic and architectural value, or make an important contribution to local countryside character. Planning authorities should:
 - i. ensure that development respects and, where possible, enhances these particular qualities, having regard to the policies on design contained in PPG1 and supported in 'By Design'¹;
 - ii. ensure that new building contributes to a sense of local identity and regional diversity and is of an appropriate design and scale for its location.

In addition, planning authorities should take a positive approach to innovative, modern designs that are sensitive both to their immediate setting and the defining characteristics of the wider local area.

¹ "*By Design*", a better practice guide published May 2000 by the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Commission for Architecture & the Built Environment.

14. Local planning authorities should prepare positive policies on rural design, utilising tools such as Countryside Character, Village Plans and Village Design Statements prepared by local communities. These policies should guide developers towards good quality design, appropriate to its location. Planning authorities should take care to apply design criteria reasonably and not render necessary development in rural areas prohibitively expensive and unfeasible, particularly where restrictive policies and decisions would adversely affect the vitality of rural communities, and their ability to adapt to change.

The Countryside

15. The policies in this section apply to the largely undeveloped countryside that separates cities, towns and villages. Whilst much of the land use activity in the countryside is outside its scope, the planning system has an important role in supporting and facilitating development and land uses which enable those who earn a living from, and help to maintain and manage the countryside, to continue to do so. The planning system must provide a positive framework for facilitating sustainable development that makes the most of new leisure and economic opportunities in the countryside, whilst minimising any potentially detrimental effects on established rural activities, communities, countryside quality and the natural environment.

Countryside protection and development in the countryside

16. Planning authorities should continue to protect the countryside for the sake of its intrinsic character and beauty, the diversity of its landscapes and wildlife and the wealth of its natural resources. They should have particular regard to any areas that have been statutorily designated for their landscape, wildlife or historic qualities where greater priority should be given to restraint of potentially damaging development.
17. When preparing their development plans and determining planning applications for development in the countryside, local planning authorities should:
 - i. support development that delivers diverse and sustainable farming enterprises;
 - ii. support other countryside-based enterprises and activities which contribute to rural economies, and/or promote recreation in and enjoyment of the countryside, and help to maintain its character and quality;
 - iii. take account of the need to protect natural resources;
 - iv. provide for the sensitive exploitation of renewable energy sources;
 - v. protect specific features and sites of landscape, wildlife and historic or architectural value, in accordance with statutory designations.

Re-use of buildings in the countryside

18. In locations other than those covered by paragraph 12, the productive re-use of existing rural buildings will usually be preferable to leaving the buildings underused, vacant or derelict. The adaptation or conversion of rural buildings (including modern buildings) for business re-use, should be supported, subject to the criteria and considerations in paragraph 20. Conversions to allow other uses with wider benefits, for example, an educational or interpretative centre at a nature conservation site, should also be supported, subject to other material planning considerations.

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19. The conversion of non-residential buildings to dwellings will not normally be appropriate where the buildings are remote from settlements and services. However, residential conversions should be supported where:
 - i. this would meet a specific local need (e.g. to house an essential worker) and would obviate the need for a new building in the countryside;
 - ii. it would otherwise provide the most sustainable option (e.g. to allow someone to live with their carers); or,
 - iii. it meets an identified housing need in less-remote locations that offer good accessibility to services in a nearby town or village; and
 - iv. such conversions do not result in the creation of a residential curtilage which would have a harmful effect on the character of the countryside.

20. In all cases involving the re-use of buildings in the countryside, local planning authorities should:
 - i. ensure that buildings are suitable for re-use (they should be of permanent and substantial construction, for example);
 - ii. ensure that any new use proposed for the building is acceptable in that location, especially where the building was originally erected under permitted development rights. It should not normally be necessary to consider whether the building is no longer needed for its present purposes. Evidence that a building is not redundant for its present use is not by itself sufficient grounds for refusing permission for a proposed new use;
 - iii. guard against new uses that are on such a large scale they would undermine the achievement of sustainable communities in rural towns and villages;
 - iv. where appropriate, set out policies in development plans for the re-use of complexes of buildings with a large aggregate floor area, and of very large individual buildings;
 - v. take care to ensure, wherever possible, the preservation of the fabric and character of buildings of historic or architectural interest, and the preservation or enhancement of the character or appearance of conservation areas;
 - vi. consider whether imposing reasonable conditions on a planning permission overcomes any legitimate planning objections (e.g. on environmental or traffic grounds) which would otherwise outweigh the advantages of re-use.

Replacement of buildings in the countryside

21. Where specific sites have not been identified for redevelopment in plans, the replacement of existing buildings in the countryside for business purposes (or, exceptionally, other purposes with wider benefits - see paragraph 18) will be acceptable where:
 - i. the replacement building would bring about an environmental improvement in terms of the impact of the development on its surroundings and the landscape; and,
 - ii. replacement would not result in the loss of, or unacceptable harm to, a building or feature of historic or architectural interest, or of nature conservation value, except where the loss (or harm) was inevitable in any case. Such cases should be considered in the light of the advice in PPG15 and PPG9;
 - iii. where the building to be demolished had been erected as permitted development, the replacement building would be acceptable in planning terms in its own right, subject to the imposition of any reasonable conditions;

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- iv. the proposed use for the replacement building would not be on such a scale as to undermine the achievement of sustainable communities in rural towns and villages;
- v. the replacement building is not substantially larger in terms of its footprint and height, than the building it is replacing.

The replacement of non-residential buildings with residential development should be treated as new housing development, in accordance with the policies in PPG3 and, where appropriate, paragraph 11 of this PPS.

Designated Areas

- 23. The conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape and countryside should be given great weight in planning policies and development control decisions in National Parks, the Broads, the New Forest Heritage Area and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Planning authorities should also set out positive policies for development necessary to facilitate the economic and social well-being of these designated areas and their communities, including the provision of adequate housing to meet identified local needs.
- 24. Major developments that are more national than local in character should not take place in these designated areas, except in exceptional circumstances. Because of the serious impact that major developments may have on these areas of natural beauty, and taking account of the recreational opportunities that they provide, applications for all such developments should be subject to the most rigorous examination. Major developments should be demonstrated to be in the public interest before being allowed to proceed. Consideration of such applications should therefore include an assessment of:
 - i. the need for the development, in terms of national considerations and the impact of permitting it or refusing it upon the local economy;
 - ii. the cost of, and scope for, developing elsewhere outside the area, or meeting the need for it in some other way;
 - iii. any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that should be moderated.

Planning authorities should ensure that any planning permission granted for major developments in these designated areas should be carried out to high environmental standards through the application of appropriate conditions where necessary.

Local countryside designations

- 25. The Government does not believe that local countryside designations are necessary and considers that the policies set out in this PPS, when incorporated into development plans, should provide sufficient protection for the countryside. In reviewing their development plans, planning authorities should remove any existing designations and instead adopt criteria-based policies in development plans for the location and design of rural development throughout their area.

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The countryside around cities and towns

26. Notwithstanding Green Belt policy (as set out in PPG2) where it applies, local planning authorities should ensure that planning policies address the particular land use issues and opportunities to be found in the countryside around all urban areas, recognising its importance to those who live or work there, and also in providing the nearest and most accessible countryside to urban residents. Planning authorities should aim to secure environmental improvements and maximise a range of beneficial uses of this land, whilst reducing potential conflicts between neighbouring land uses. This should include improvement of public access (e.g. through support for country parks and community forests) and facilitating the provision of sport and recreation facilities.

Agriculture, Farm Diversification, Equine-Related Activities and Forestry

Agricultural development

27. Local planning authorities should adopt positive planning policies, and support development proposals, that will enable farming and farmers to:
- become more competitive, sustainable and environmentally friendly;
 - adapt to new and changing markets;
 - comply with changing legislation and associated guidance;
 - diversify into new agricultural opportunities (e.g. renewable energy crops);
 - or broaden their operations to 'add value' to their primary produce.

Best and most versatile agricultural land

28. The presence of best and most versatile agricultural land (defined as land in grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Agricultural Land Classification), should be taken into account alongside other sustainability considerations (e.g. biodiversity; the quality and character of the landscape; its amenity value or heritage interest; accessibility to infrastructure, workforce and markets; maintaining viable communities; and the protection of natural resources, including soil quality) when determining planning applications. Where significant development of agricultural land is unavoidable, local planning authorities should seek to use areas of poorer quality land (grades 3b, 4 and 5) in preference to that of a higher quality, except where this would be inconsistent with other sustainability considerations. Little weight in agricultural terms should be given to the loss of agricultural land in grades 3b, 4 and 5, except in areas (such as uplands) where particular agricultural practices may themselves contribute in some special way to the quality of the environment or the local economy. If any undeveloped agricultural land needs to be developed, any adverse effects on the environment should be minimised.
29. Development plans should include policies that identify any major areas of agricultural land that are planned for development. But local planning authorities may also wish to include policies in their plan to protect specific areas of best and most versatile agricultural land from speculative development. It is for local planning authorities to decide whether best and most versatile agricultural land can be developed, having carefully weighed the options in the light of competent advice.

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Farm diversification²

30. Recognising that diversification into non-agricultural activities is vital to the continuing viability of many farm enterprises, local planning authorities should:
- i. set out in their development plans the criteria to be applied to planning applications for farm diversification projects;
 - ii. be supportive of well-conceived farm diversification schemes for business purposes that are consistent in their scale with their rural location. This applies equally to farm diversification schemes around the fringes of urban areas;
 - iii. give favourable consideration to proposals for diversification in Green Belts where the development preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. (Where farm diversification proposals in the Green Belt would result in inappropriate development in terms of PPG2, any wider benefits of the diversification may contribute to the 'very special circumstances' required by PPG2 for a development to be granted planning permission).
31. A supportive approach to farm diversification should not result in excessive expansion and encroachment of building development into the countryside. Planning authorities should:
- i. encourage the re-use or replacement of existing buildings where feasible, having regard to paragraphs 18-22;
 - ii. have regard to the amenity of any nearby residents or other rural businesses that may be adversely affected by new types of on-farm development.

Equine-related activities

32. Horse riding and other equestrian activities are popular forms of recreation in the countryside that can fit in well with farming activities and help to diversify rural economies. In some parts of the country, horse training and breeding businesses play an important economic role. Local planning authorities should set out in development plans their policies for supporting equine enterprises, whilst maintaining environmental quality and countryside character. These policies should provide for a range of suitably located recreational and leisure facilities and, where appropriate, for the needs of training and breeding businesses. They should also facilitate the re-use of farm buildings for small-scale horse enterprises³ that provide a useful form of farm diversification.

Forestry

33. Whilst forestry operations mostly lie outside the scope of planning controls, the planning system is the principal means for regulating the rate at which land is transferred from woodlands to other rural and urban uses. The Government's forestry policy, set out in the England Forestry Strategy (1999) has two main aims:
- the sustainable management of existing woods and forests; and

² The research report, *The Implementation of National Planning Policy Guidance (PPG7) in Relation to the Diversification of Farm Businesses*, published in October 2001 by the former DTLR and now available from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, sets out a number of recommendations for local planning authorities, and contains some examples of 'good practice'.

³ That is, enterprises involving up to ten horses.

- a continued steady expansion of woodland area to provide more benefits for society and the environment.

Local planning authorities should have regard to these aims, and forthcoming Regional Forestry Frameworks, when preparing development plans and deciding planning applications.

Tourism and Leisure

34. Planning authorities should recognise that tourism and leisure activities are vital to many rural economies. As well as sustaining many rural businesses, these industries are a significant source of employment and help to support the prosperity of country towns and villages, and sustain historic country houses, local heritage and culture. Local planning authorities should:
- support, through plan policies and development control decisions, sustainable rural tourism and leisure proposals that benefit rural businesses, communities, and visitors and which utilise and enrich, but do not harm, the character of the countryside, its towns, villages, buildings and other features⁴;
 - recognise that in areas statutorily designated for their landscape, nature conservation or historic qualities, there will be scope for tourist and leisure related developments, subject to appropriate control over their number and location to protect environmental quality;
 - subject proposals for large-scale tourism and leisure developments in rural areas to close assessment to weigh-up their advantages and disadvantages to the locality in terms of sustainability. In particular, the policy in PPG13 should be followed in such cases where high volumes of traffic may be generated.

Tourist and visitor facilities

35. The provision of essential facilities for tourist visitors is vital for the development of the tourism industry in rural areas. Local planning authorities should:
- plan for and support the provision of general tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing facilities in rural service centres. Where new or additional facilities are required, these should normally be provided in, or close to, service centres or villages;
 - allow small-scale facilities needed to enhance visitors' enjoyment and/or improve the financial viability of a particular countryside feature or attraction, providing they will not detract from the attractiveness or importance of the feature, or the surrounding countryside.
36. Wherever possible, tourist and visitor facilities should be housed in existing or replacement buildings, particularly where they are located outside existing settlements. Facilities requiring new buildings in the countryside may be justified where the required facilities are needed in conjunction with a particular countryside attraction; they meet the criteria in paragraph 35(ii); and there are no suitable existing buildings or developed sites available for re-use.

⁴ In line with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport's strategy document 'Tomorrow's Tourism'.

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Tourist accommodation

37. The Government expects most tourist accommodation requiring new buildings to be located in, or adjacent to, existing towns and villages.
38. The conversion of suitable existing rural buildings to provide hotel and other serviced accommodation should also be allowed, subject to the policies on the re-use of rural buildings (paragraphs 12 and 18-20). Similarly, planning authorities should adopt a positive approach to extensions to existing tourist accommodation where the scale of the extension is appropriate to its location and where the extension may help to ensure the future viability of such businesses.
39. In considering proposals for static holiday and touring caravan parks and holiday chalet developments, planning authorities should:
 - i. carefully weigh the objective of providing adequate facilities and sites with the need to protect landscapes and environmentally sensitive sites, and examine the scope for re-locating existing sites away from sensitive areas;
 - ii. where appropriate (e.g. in popular holiday areas), set out policies in development plans on the provision of new holiday and touring caravan sites and chalet developments, and on the expansion and improvement of existing sites and developments (e.g. to improve layouts and provide better landscaping);
 - iii. ensure that new or expanded sites are effectively screened so they are not prominent in the landscape or visually intrusive.
40. Local planning authorities should support the provision of other forms of self-catering holiday accommodation in rural areas where there is a demand for such accommodation. The re-use and conversion of existing non-residential buildings for this purpose may have added benefits, e.g. as a farm diversification scheme. But authorities should weigh the re-use of the building for holiday accommodation with the need, and the suitability of the buildings, for other uses, including affordable housing to meet identified local needs. Policies on re-use of buildings for self-catering tourist accommodation should be set out in development plans.

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Annex A: Agricultural, Forestry and other Occupational Dwellings

Paragraph 11 of PPS7 makes clear that isolated new houses in the countryside require special justification for planning permission to be granted. One of the few circumstances in which isolated residential development may be justified is when accommodation is required to enable agricultural, forestry and certain other full-time workers to live at, or in the immediate vicinity of, their place of work. Normally it will be as convenient for such workers to live in nearby towns or villages and this may have domestic and social advantages, as well as avoiding potentially intrusive development in the countryside. However, there will be some cases where the nature and demands of the work concerned make it essential for one or more people engaged in the enterprise to live at, or very close to, the site of their work. Whether this is essential in any particular case will depend on the needs of the enterprise concerned and not on the personal preferences or circumstances of any of the individuals involved.

It is essential that all applications for planning permission for new occupational dwellings in the countryside are scrutinised thoroughly with the aim of detecting attempts to abuse (i.e. through speculative proposals) the concession that the planning system makes for such dwellings. In particular, it will be important to establish that stated intentions to engage in farming, forestry or any other rural-based enterprises are genuine, are reasonably likely to materialise and are capable of being sustained for a reasonable period of time. It will also be important to establish that the needs of the intended enterprise require one or more of the people engaged in it to live nearby.

Permanent agricultural dwellings

New permanent dwellings should only be allowed to support existing agricultural activities on well-established agricultural units, providing:

- i. there is a clearly established existing functional need (see paragraph 4 below);
 - ii. the need relates to a full-time worker, or one who is primarily employed in agriculture and does not relate to a part-time requirement;
 - iii. the unit and the agricultural activity concerned have been established for at least three years, have been profitable for at least one of them, are currently financially sound, and have a clear prospect of remaining so (see paragraph 8 below);
 - iv. the functional need could not be fulfilled by another dwelling on the unit, or any other existing accommodation in the area which is suitable and available for occupation by the workers concerned; and
 - iv. other planning requirements, e.g. in relation to access, or impact on the countryside, are satisfied.
4. A *functional test* is necessary to establish whether it is essential for the proper functioning of the enterprise for one or more workers to be readily available at most times. Such a requirement might arise, for example, if workers are needed to be on hand day and night:
- i. in case animals or agricultural processes require essential care at short notice;
 - ii. to deal quickly with emergencies that could otherwise cause serious loss of crops or products, for example, by frost damage or the failure of automatic systems.
5. In cases where the local planning authority is particularly concerned about possible abuse, it should investigate the history of the holding to establish the recent pattern of use of land and buildings and whether, for example, any dwellings, or buildings suitable for conversion to dwellings, have recently been sold separately from the farmland concerned. Such a sale could constitute evidence of lack of agricultural need.

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6. The protection of livestock from theft or injury by intruders may contribute on animal welfare grounds to the need for an agricultural dwelling, although it will not by itself be sufficient to justify one. Requirements arising from food processing, as opposed to agriculture, cannot be used to justify an agricultural dwelling. Nor can agricultural needs justify the provision of new dwellings as retirement homes for farmers.
7. If a functional requirement is established, it will then be necessary to consider the number of workers needed to meet it, for which the scale and nature of the enterprise will be relevant.
8. New permanent accommodation cannot be justified on agricultural grounds unless the farming enterprise is economically viable. A financial test is necessary for this purpose, and to provide evidence of the size of dwelling which the unit can sustain. In applying this test authorities should take a realistic approach to the level of profitability, taking account of the nature of the enterprise concerned. Some enterprises which aim to operate broadly on a subsistence basis, but which nonetheless provide wider benefits (e.g. in managing attractive landscapes or wildlife habitats), can be sustained on relatively low financial returns.
9. Agricultural dwellings should be of a size commensurate with the established functional requirement. Dwellings that are unusually large in relation to the agricultural needs of the unit, or unusually expensive to construct in relation to the income it can sustain in the long-term, should not be permitted. It is the requirements of the enterprise, rather than those of the owner or occupier, that are relevant in determining the size of dwelling that is appropriate to a particular holding.
10. Local planning authorities may wish to consider making planning permissions subject to conditions removing some of the permitted development rights under part 1 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 for development within the curtilage of a dwelling house. For example, proposed extensions could result in a dwelling whose size exceeded what could be justified by the functional requirement, and affect the continued viability of maintaining the property for its intended use, given the income that the agricultural unit can sustain. However, it will always be preferable for such conditions to restrict the use of specific permitted development rights rather than to be drafted in terms which withdraw all those in a Class (see paragraphs 86-90 of the Annex to DOE Circular 11/95).
11. Agricultural dwellings should be sited so as to meet the identified functional need and to be well-related to existing farm buildings, or other dwellings.

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Temporary agricultural dwellings

12. If a new dwelling is essential to support a new farming activity, whether on a newly-created agricultural unit or an established one, it should normally, for the first three years, be provided by a caravan, a wooden structure which can be easily dismantled, or other temporary accommodation. It should satisfy the following criteria:
 - i. clear evidence of a firm intention and ability to develop the enterprise concerned (significant investment in new farm buildings is often a good indication of intentions);
 - ii. functional need (see paragraph 4 of this Annex);
 - iii. clear evidence that the proposed enterprise has been planned on a sound financial basis;
 - iv. the functional need could not be fulfilled by another dwelling on the unit, or any other existing accommodation in the area which is suitable and available for occupation by the workers concerned; and
 - v. other normal planning requirements, e.g. on siting and access, are satisfied.
13. If permission for temporary accommodation is granted, permission for a permanent dwelling should not subsequently be given unless the criteria in paragraph 3 above are met. The planning authority should make clear the period for which the temporary permission is granted, the fact that the temporary dwelling will have to be removed, and the requirements that will have to be met if a permanent permission is to be granted. Authorities should not grant successive extensions to a temporary permission over a period of more than three years, nor should they give temporary permissions in locations where they would not permit a permanent dwelling.

Forestry dwellings

14. Local planning authorities should apply the same criteria to applications for forestry dwellings as to agricultural dwellings. The other principles in the advice on agricultural dwellings are equally relevant to forestry dwellings. Under conventional methods of forestry management, which can involve the use of a peripatetic workforce, new forestry dwellings may not always be justified, except perhaps to service intensive nursery production of trees.

Other occupational dwellings

15. There may also be instances where special justification exists for isolated dwellings associated with other rural-based enterprises. Before a planning application for such a dwelling can be considered, the enterprise itself, including any development necessary for the operation of the enterprise, must have planning permission. Local planning authorities should apply the same criteria and principles in paragraphs 3-13 of this Annex, as far as they are appropriate to the nature of the enterprise concerned, to applications for other occupational dwellings in the countryside.

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Occupancy conditions

16. Where the need to provide accommodation to enable farm, forestry or other workers to live at or near their place of work has been accepted as providing the special justification required for new, isolated residential development in the countryside, it will be necessary to ensure that the dwellings are kept available for meeting this need for as long as it exists. For this purpose planning permission should be made subject to an appropriate occupancy condition. DOE Circular 11/95 gives further advice and provides model occupancy conditions for agricultural dwellings and for other staff accommodation.
17. Changes in the scale and character of farming and forestry may affect the longer-term requirement for dwellings for which permission has been granted subject to an agricultural or forestry occupancy condition. Such dwellings, and others in the countryside with an occupancy condition attached, should not be kept vacant, nor should their present occupants be unnecessarily obliged to remain in occupation simply by virtue of planning conditions restricting occupancy which have outlived their usefulness. Local planning authorities should set out in development plans their policies on the retention or removal of agricultural and forestry occupancy conditions. These policies should be based on an up to date assessment of the demand for farm and forestry dwellings in the area, bearing in mind that it is the need for a dwelling for someone solely, mainly or last working in agriculture in an area as a whole and not just on the particular holding, that is relevant.

Information and appraisals

18. Planning authorities should be able to determine most applications for occupational dwellings in the countryside, including cases involving the imposition or removal of occupancy conditions, on the basis of their experience and the information provided by the applicant and any other interested parties. If this is not the case, agricultural or other consultants may be able to give a technical appraisal. This should be confined to a factual statement of the agricultural, or other business considerations involved and an evaluation of the specific points on which advice is sought; no recommendation for or against the application should be made.

Part 3: Initial/Partial Regulatory Impact Assessment

Purpose and Intended Effect

1. The objective is to provide a clear, up to date Statement of national Planning Policies (PPS) for rural areas, to ensure that the planning system helps to facilitate sustainable development and sustainable communities in these areas, as well as protection for the countryside. This PPS (and accompanying guidance still to be drafted) would replace Planning Policy Guidance note 7 (PPG7), *The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development*.

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2. The PPS would not, in itself, be a regulatory measure, but it would guide planning authorities in the way they carry out their statutory duties under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and other planning legislation. The effect of the PPS should be that local planning policies and Regional Spatial Strategies, and development control decisions, properly reflect the Government's broader policy objectives for rural areas and the countryside, sustainable development and regional productivity.
3. There are no specific risks in issuing the PPS. The main risk in not issuing is that planning authorities will adopt planning policies and take development control decisions that are of a less consistent nature, and less likely to be in accordance with the Government's wider policies. This may have adverse consequences for the well-being of rural communities, rural-based business, including agricultural businesses, and the quality of the countryside, including nationally designated landscapes.

Options

4. The December 2001 Planning Green Paper, Planning - delivering a fundamental change, explained that national planning policies are an essential way for the government to achieve its objectives. However, the Green Paper noted the shortcomings in the present volume and nature of national planning policy guidance. The Paper announced the Government's intention to review all its planning policy guidance; to see whether it is needed; to seek greater clarity; and to remove from national policy guidance advice on practical implementation and policies which are better expressed at a regional or local level.
5. Following consultation on the Green Paper, the Government announced (18 July 2002) that it intended to proceed with the proposals for review and reform of national planning policy guidance. In carrying out the review, the aim was not to change the existing balance of economic, social and environmental objectives. The review of PPG7 was undertaken, and the draft of PPS7 prepared, against this background, which influenced, and effectively limited, the options considered (below), including any consideration of the 'do nothing' option:
Option 1: To do without specific planning policies, and/or specific planning policy guidance, for rural areas.
Option 2: To update the existing policy framework provided by PPG7 and recast this guidance into a shorter PPS, with some accompanying guidance.
Option 3: To undertake a fundamental overhaul and radical re-write of planning policies for rural areas.
6. With regard to *option 1*, the Government believes it is essential to have national planning policies that specifically address the needs and circumstances of rural areas, as identified in its November 2000 Rural White Paper, *Our countryside - the future*. It would be possible to include most of these policies in other PPG/PPS, supported by accompanying guidance. However, the Government believes that this would result in a less clear, less coherent and unfocused planning framework for rural areas, and would fail to reflect the importance the Government attaches to the well-being of rural communities and the countryside. It also believes that presenting rural planning policies in such a dispersed manner would be unhelpful to planning authorities, developers and businesses.

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7. Pursuing *option 2* allows the Government to maintain and update established and generally well respected planning policies for rural areas. This approach would help to maintain continuity and consistency, whilst ensuring planning policies are relevant to this Government's wider policy objectives. It also accords with the Government's stated intention not to change the existing balance of economic, social and environmental objectives through the review. The changeover from PPG7 to PPS7 should be relatively easy to implement.
8. *Option 3*, which could, for example, involve a major relaxation (or tightening) of planning policies for some types of development in the countryside, would inevitably be more controversial. Major changes in rural planning policies may be difficult to implement without similar changes to other PPG/PPS, in order to avoid inconsistency. However, it is not clear that such a radical approach is necessary to deliver the Government's wider policy objectives. Nor is there any strong pressure for such an approach. Indeed, informal views from a number of key, rural interests indicate a clear desire to maintain an approach based firmly on sustainable development principles, similar to the overall framework currently provided by PPG7.
9. The greater levels of risks, in terms of potential failure of the planning system to deliver the Government's vision and wider policies for rural areas, are associated with option 1 and, potentially, *option 3*.
10. Our clear preference is for *option 2*.

Business Sectors Affected

11. Neither PPG7, nor its eventual replacement PPS7, are sector-specific. PPS7 will apply to all businesses, and community/voluntary groups, in rural areas, to the extent that planning legislation applies to these interests and their activities. PPS7 will be of particular relevance to the agricultural sector in terms of agricultural development and farm diversification, although it will not apply to agricultural operations.

Costs and Benefits

12. As noted above, PPS7 would not be a regulatory measure. With or without the PPS, rural businesses (and others) will still need to obtain planning permission for development in accordance with planning legislation. PPG7 seeks to guide planning authorities, as would PPS7, in the exercise of their statutory planning duties, to ensure the development and use of land is to the general benefit of rural communities and businesses, and is in the wider public interest.

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13. The costs and benefits of any of the three options set out above are extremely difficult to quantify, in comparison to the existing planning policy framework set out in PPG7. However, in our opinion, the comparative costs of pursuing preferred *option 2* would be negligible. The potential benefits of this option are that planning authorities would have a clearer, up to date statement of the Government's aims and objectives for rural areas and the relevant national policy policies to achieve their delivery, consistent with other PPG/PPS, which recognises and permits the adoption of planning policies tailored to regional and local priorities. This should ensure that planning authorities are supportive of sustainable development in the best interests (in broad terms) of rural businesses and communities, whilst maintaining appropriate protection for the countryside.
14. The potential comparative costs of *option 1* may also be negligible, but this option is less likely to deliver the benefits identified for *option 2*. The potential costs and benefits of *option 3* would depend on the extent and nature of any proposed new policies. It would be open to respondents to the public consultation draft of PPS7 to propose new policies and identify any associated costs and benefits.
15. The Small Business Service has been consulted over a first draft of PPS7 and given an initial, positive response to these proposals.

Compliance

16. PPS7 will not have any direct statutory effect on businesses. Accordingly, there are no direct compliance requirements. Planning authorities must have regard to PPG/PPS in formulating local planning policies, and they may also be material to the consideration of individual planning applications. Adherence to PPG/PPS by planning authorities is monitored in the first instance by Regional Government Offices (through their scrutiny of local plans and planning policies), and by The Planning Inspectorate through local plan inquiries and planning appeals. The First Secretary of State (the Deputy Prime Minister) has powers of intervention, but uses these powers sparingly.

Monitoring and Review

17. The Government keeps its planning policies and associated guidance under regular review, usually in consultation with other arms of government and other interested parties. It may also commission research on the effectiveness of these policies where appropriate.

Summary and Recommendation

18. The Planning Green Paper announced the Government's proposals for review and reform of its national planning policy guidance. PPG7 has been reviewed in this context and three, broad options considered.

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19. We do not believe that *option 1* would be helpful to planning authorities, or to other 'users' of the planning system. It is more likely to lead to inconsistency and uncertainty in the operation of the planning system in rural areas. We believe that *option 2* satisfies the Green Paper proposals for review and reform, as well as facilitating the achievement of the Government's wider policy objectives. We think it is the most helpful option for planning authorities and other 'users'. We do not believe there is a pressing need for a more radical change to rural planning policies that might require the pursuit of *option 3*.
20. It is therefore recommended that option 2 be adopted for public consultation. We shall, however, carefully consider any realistic proposals for more radical changes to rural planning policies, together with associated costs and benefits, which arise through the consultation, and that might require the Office to give further consideration to *option 3*.

Part 4: Statement of Consultation

- 1 Timing of consultation should be built into the planning process for a policy (including legislation) or service from the start, so that it has the best prospect of improving the proposals concerned, and so that sufficient time is left for it at each stage.
- 2 It should be clear who is being consulted, about what questions, in what timescale and for what purpose.
- 3 A consultation document should be as simple and concise as possible. It should include a summary, in two pages at most, of the main questions it seeks views on. It should make it as easy as possible for readers to respond, make contact or complain.
- 4 Documents should be made widely available, with the fullest use of electronic means (though not to the exclusion of others), and effectively drawn to the attention of all interested groups and individuals.
- 5 Sufficient time should be allowed for considered responses from all groups with an interest. Twelve weeks should be the standard minimum period for a consultation.
- 6 Responses should be carefully and open-mindedly analysed, and the results made widely available, with an account of the views expressed, and reasons for decisions finally taken.
- 7 Departments should monitor and evaluate consultations, designating a consultation co-ordinator who will ensure the lessons are disseminated.

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